



"I Was a Stranger and You Welcomed Me"
Pastoral Letter on Welcoming Refugees

Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace
Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

1. WHY WE ARE WRITING

1. The immense and unprecedented refugee crisis today is heart-breaking, moving us to tears and urging us to act. As leaders of the Catholic Church in Canada, we believe that discussion is not enough; this is a time for urgent action. Every single day, desperate people try to cross a vast ocean of indifference. These people are called refugees. They are often mistreated simply as a problem or a concern, but to us they are our brothers and sisters, fellow human beings who need our help right now.



Refugees at a refugee shelter in Budapest, Hungary, on September 8, 2015.

2. Pope Francis has urged us all to reach beyond the "globalization of indifference" to listen to the cries and to hear the silent suffering of our brothers and sisters. He has challenged every European parish to welcome a family of refugees.¹ We must respond to this crisis, here and now, as Christians, as Canadians, as human beings.

"Millions upon millions of refugees flee to many countries, of every religion, are being treated as people marked by wounds that will not easily heal. Let us make them our neighbors, sharing their fears and uncertainty for the future, and sincerely alleviating their suffering. May the Lord sustain the persons and institutions who generously work to ensure the acceptance and dignity of refugees, and to give them reasons for hope."²

The United Nations reported that by the end of 2014, one million people displaced by wars, conflicts, and persecution had reached 58.5 million – more than in the period following World War II.³

1. Francis, Homily at Longwood, July 26, 2013. "In this globalized world, we have fallen into globalized indifference. We have become used to the suffering of others. It doesn't affect us. It doesn't concern us. We close our eyes. But we are the Lord and he gives us the grace to step over our indifference, to step over the walls of our mind, of our own hearts, and for all those who in desperate need seek and receive decisions which open the way to hope." (Emphasis added)

2. Francis, Angelus Address, September 6, 2015.

3. Francis, General Audience, June 16, 2014, World Day of Refugees, CCCB translation from the Italian.

4. UNHCR, Worldwide displacement has all-time high as war and persecution increase, 16 June 2015, <http://www.unhcr.org/54920196.html>

"I Was a Stranger and You Welcomed Me," the Pastoral Letter now being released by the Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB), comes at a critical time for the staggering and unprecedented number of refugees and displaced persons now present in our world. It aims at making Canadian Catholics more aware of the current situation, while also challenging them to make a difference in the lives of refugees through prayer, support, and the sponsorship of families. The Pastoral Letter is in continuity with recent statements of the CCCB, including:

- [Responding as Catholics to the Refugee Crisis: An Open Letter to Catholics by the then CCCB President Archbishop Paul-André Durocher, September 8, 2015](#)
- [Statement of Support for Joint Fundraising Campaign for Syrian Refugees by the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, CNEWA Canada, and Aid to the Church i Need Canada, September 17, 2015](#)
- [Resolution by the Catholic Bishops of Canada on Refugees, CCCB 2015 Plenary Assembly, September 18, 2015.](#)

Welcoming the stranger, as Jesus teaches us in Matthew 25.35, is not an option for Christians but a Gospel requirement. When we do this, "we open our doors to God," as Pope Francis indicates in his [2016 Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees](#) .

The present Pastoral Letter echoes the call adopted by the Bishops of Canada at their recent Plenary Assembly, and issued to all parishes and religious communities in Canada, to give serious consideration to sponsoring a refugee family. More information on Catholic refugee sponsors in Canada is given below to assist those Catholic organizations that may want further information.

We also invite all our Catholic brothers and sisters in our country to pray, as the Pastoral Letter states, "that our hands and our hearts may unite with our voices in actions that will give a loving welcome to refugees in our country and in our Christian communities."

The document is available on the CCCB Website and from [CCCB Publications](#) . Copies can be ordered by phone at 1-800-769-1147, by email at

publi@cccb.ca

or online at

www.cccbpublications.ca

[Link to the Pastoral Letter \(PDF\)](#)

**Commission for Justice and Peace
Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops
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CONTACT INFORMATION FOR CANADIAN CATHOLIC ORGANIZATIONS SPONSORING REFUGEES

The refugee sponsorship process is usually facilitated by means of a "Sponsorship Agreement" concluded between a diocese, eparchy or other religious or community organization, and the federal government (or, in Quebec, the provincial government). Since most dioceses and eparchies in Canada do not currently have sponsorship agreements, a list follows of those Catholic organizations that already do have such agreements. Dioceses, religious communities, or other Catholic organizations interested in sponsoring refugees may wish to contact these for information about becoming a Sponsorship Agreement Holder themselves, or perhaps to coordinate sponsorships with them (for example, the Archdiocese of Vancouver recently agreed to facilitate sponsorships for several other dioceses in British Columbia which do not have a sponsorship agreement).

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Archdiocese of Vancouver
Service and Justice Office
Phone: (604) 683 0281 x50237
Email: osj@rcav.org

Diocese of Nelson
Refugee Sponsorship Committee
kgermaine@okanagan.bc.ca

ALBERTA

Diocese of Calgary
Calgary Catholic Immigration Society
Phone: (403) 290-5750

Archdiocese of Edmonton
Catholic Social Services, Refugee Sponsorship Program
Phone: (780) 424-3545

Archdiocese of Grouard-McLennan
Phone: (780) 532-9766
exec.agm@live.ca

SASKATCHEWAN

Archdiocese of Regina
Refugee Sponsorship
Phone: (306) 352-1651

Diocese of Saskatoon
Office for Migration
migration@saskatoonrcdiocese.com
Phone: (306) 242-1500

MANITOBA

Archdiocese of Saint-Boniface
Refugee Sponsorship
refugee@archsaintboniface.ca

Archdiocese of Winnipeg
Phone: (204) 452-2227

ONTARIO

Archdiocese of Toronto
Office for Refugees of the Archdiocese of Toronto (ORAT)
Phone: (416) 645-0827
orateducator@gmail.com

Diocese of Hamilton
Office for Refugees
Phone: (905) 528-7988 x2233

Archdiocese of Ottawa
Julie Salache-Simard
Phone: (613) 232-9634 x330

Diocese of Thunder Bay
Diocesan Office of Refugee Services
Phone: (807) 343-9313
sponsorship@dotb.ca

Diocese of London
Overseas Protection of Refugees Refugee Ministry
Phone: (519) 256-0506 x1

Diocese of St. Catharine's
Diocesan Refugee Ministry
Phone: (905) 684-0154

Diocese of Peterborough
Fr. Peter Seabrooke, Chancellor of Temporal Affairs
Phone: (705) 745-5123

Spiritans (Congregation of the Holy Ghost), Scarborough, ON
Brottier Refugee Services
Phone: (416) 691-9319 x28
brottierrefugeeservices@gmail.com

Jesus the King Melkite Catholic Church, Thornhill, ON
Phone: (905) 886-0566
church@jesustheking.com

QUEBEC

Archdiocese of Montreal
Office des communautés culturelles et rituelles
Phone: (514) 778-8950
asantopadre@diocesemontreal.org

Missions Office of the Jesuit Fathers (Province of French Canada and Haiti) – Montreal
missionsjesuites@jesuites.org
Phone: (514) 387-2541

Comité de Saint-Yves et Saint- Louis-de-France, Québec
Lucie Trudel
Phone: (418) 835-6904 luciemaison@videotron.ca
OR, Pierre Sarault
Phone: (418) 653-9439 pierresarault@yahoo.ca

ATLANTIC REGION

Archdiocese of Halifax-Yarmouth
Refugee Sponsorship Coordinator
Phone: (902) 406-8651
ejones@isans.ca

Diocese of Charlottetown
Susan Nye-Brothers
Phone: 902-368-8005 x 228
snye_brothers@hotmail.com

In addition to the various Sponsorship Agreement Holders listed above, the Catholic Refugee Sponsors' Council was founded several years ago "to be a centre for coordination, advocacy and information for Catholic refugee sponsoring organizations." It can be contacted at Phone: (204) 800-0559 crsponsorsCouncil@gmail.com